

Senator McManus's Speech for STTOP Petition, 06/09/04

I am proud to speak in favor of the Peoples Override today. I am one of its more than 460,000 co-sponsors.

Today, the Legislature will make history. We will approve the citizen-initiated Legal Birth Definition Act and make it law, despite gross distortions by its opponents, despite threatened legal challenges and despite the governor's Friday-afternoon veto of Senate Bill 395, the original version of this proposal.

We will show that you cannot hold back the will of the people. Partial birth abortion offends the conscience of Michigan. The Constitution allowed the citizens of Michigan 180 days to collect 254,000 signatures to submit this proposal to the Legislature. It only took 90 days to collect more than 460,000 signatures – and the petition circulators were an all-volunteer force.

Thousands of everyday men and women from every one of our Senate districts made a difference. And now it's our turn. By a simple majority vote, we will make the Legal Birth Definition Act the law in Michigan.

With that vote, we can protect women – their health and their dignity. We can prevent women late in their pregnancy from being pressured into medically-risky abortions. We can refocus our society on supporting, protecting and healing women with troubled pregnancies – rather than throwing them away. Our daughters, nieces, and granddaughters – and the children they will carry – are not “throw-aways.” I support the Legal Birth Definition Act for my nieces, my daughters – and for myself.

By approving the Legal Birth Definition Act, we can enact a basic standard of decency: A child who is in the process of being born deserves the full legal protections that you and I have. This debate is not about some abstract rights. It's about how we could deny physical protection to a partially-born child in good conscience. We must protect these children. They are among Michigan's most vulnerable members.

The opponents of this legislation have done their best to hide the exception for the mother's life and physical health. Opponents have to fall back on half-truths and mischaracterizations, because the exception is present and it is reasonable. The Legal Birth Definition Act makes an exception for extreme and rare circumstances where the delivery of a child threatens the mother's life or physical health.

So what is an adequate “health exception” for the opposition? Apparently, it means an “exception” that would allow the abortion to occur in almost any circumstance. They ask for a “mental health” exception. Does that mean we should authorize abortions where the mother might feel bad that she's delivering a child at a difficult time in her life, or because the child has special needs?

Do we discard the ill and the elderly because it hurts our so-called “mental health?” Do we discard the sick and the vulnerable because their care is expensive or inconvenient? If these living, breathing, partially-born children do not deserve our protection, how will we protect the ill and the elderly? The answer is that if we don't protect these vulnerable children, then it's only a matter of time before the ill and elderly are threatened. The Legal Birth Definition Act is a test of Michigan's sense of human dignity and moral decency. The 460,000 “co-sponsors” that brought the act to us today have passed the test. Now it's our turn.